

THE DIRECTOR OF
CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

Deputy Director for National Foreign Assessment

6 FEB 1980

NOTE FOR THE DIRECTOR

Attached is our response to your recent request for an analysis of the impact of Israeli public opinion on the Begin government's peace negotiation policy, the reliability of Israeli public opinion polls and our access to these polls.

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Bruce C. Clarke, Jr.

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Attachment:
PA M 80-10054

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
National Foreign Assessment Center

4 February 1980

MEMORANDUM

IMPACT OF ISRAELI PUBLIC OPINION
ON THE BEGIN GOVERNMENT'S NEGOTIATING POSTURE

Public pressure is unlikely to cause Prime Minister Begin to moderate significantly the substance of his negotiating stance on major unresolved issues in the Palestinian autonomy negotiations with Egypt. Begin probably will continue to adhere to a rigid line because of his conservative ideological, religious and security views and concern to assure support from key hardliners who hold the balance of power in his ruling coalition. []

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Polls demonstrate that a majority of Israelis oppose Begin's Jewish settlements policy on the West Bank. A plurality favors a moratorium on new settlements while autonomy talks continue. A majority of Israelis appear willing to return Arab population centers on the West Bank to Jordan as part of a comprehensive peace. []

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Begin, however, has made his dedication to permanent retention of all the West Bank and an aggressive settlements policy hallmarks of his political career. We do not believe he is ideologically, emotionally or politically prepared to deviate substantially from this commitment. Begin, moreover, is conscious that hardliners in his Herut contingent of the Likud bloc and in the National Religious Party, his major coalition ally, would resign to bring down the government if he contemplated major West Bank concessions. []

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*This memorandum was prepared by [] the
Near East South Asia Division, Office of Political Analysis.
It has not been coordinated because of time constraints.
Questions and comments are welcome and should be addressed
to [] Near East South Asia Division
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Begin and his allies are likely eventually to yield on minor points of procedure related to the election and organization of a Palestinian self-governing entity. They would aim to inflate the appearance of Israel's concessions to gain Egypt's acquiescence to limited Palestinian self-rule. []

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Begin probably remains confident of his ability to manipulate and divide his public opposition on peace issues. To these ends, he will continue to exploit domestic opposition to the PLO, strong public support for Jewish rights in principle to settle in the West Bank and near unanimous opposition to surrender of Israeli sovereignty over a united Jerusalem. []

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Begin also is fully aware that his public opposition is concentrated among elements traditionally supportive of the opposition Labor Party and thus without effective voice within his government. Most lower-income Sephardic Jews--constituting over half of the electorate and Begin's political bedrock--back the Prime Minister on major peace issues. []

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Supplemental Information on Israeli Public Opinion Polls

The Gallup and Harris services and several Israeli agencies poll adult Israeli Jewish opinion about once a month. Israeli minority views--Arab, Druze, Circassian--are not usually sampled. Polls appear in the Israeli press and are transmitted to us by FBIS and the US Embassy in Tel Aviv. []

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Despite some advances in polling techniques, none of the polls are particularly reliable in predicting specific events. They are useful mainly in charting over time broad trends and perceptions among the Israeli Jewish population. Significant segments of Israeli public opinion, particularly Sephardic Jews, distrust polltakers, suspecting them of being government agents, tax officials or as otherwise engaged in gathering potentially damaging personal information. Many Israelis slant their responses or refuse to answer. Polls as a result usually show a large undecided group, often a third or more of the electorate. This factor tends to distort polling results and their implications. []

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The leading Israeli agencies, all of which conduct their polls by private interviews of a relatively representative cross-section of Israeli society, are:

--Modi'in Ezrachi Applied Research Center; polls for the Jerusalem Post; was the only polling agency to predict correctly the outcome of the 1977 national election.

--PORI (Public Opinion Research of Israel); polls for Haaretz, a popular morning daily newspaper.

--Institutes of Applied Social Research and Communications of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem; polls for Yediot Aharonot, a hawkish afternoon daily and the most popular paper in Israel. []

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Dahaf Research Institute is an advertising agency that conducts public opinion polls as a sideline. Its polling is done by telephone interviews that are not as representative as those of Modi'in, PORI and Hebrew University. []

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Hanoch Smith, an expatriate American who has lived in Israel about 30 years, heads an independent consulting firm in the field of manpower planning and does some polling as a sideline. Prior to his current work, Smith was director of manpower planning in the Ministry of Labor. []

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We have appended a listing and copies of some recent NESAs/ISL production that made extensive use of Israeli polls.

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SUBJECT: Impact of Israeli Public Opinion on the Begin
Government's Negotiating Posture

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2 - OPA/PS
1 - OPA/NESA
3 - PPG
1 - PB/NSC

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NFAC/OPA/NESA (4 Feb 80)

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MEMORANDUM FOR: D/NFAC

The DCI requested this memorandum

The memorandum briefly explains the likely limited future impact of Israeli domestic opinion in moderating Prime Minister Begin's hardline negotiating stance, the reasons underlying Begin's toughminded approach and our own access to US and Israeli polls of Israeli attitudes.

Helene L. Boatner
Director, Political Analysis

Date 4 February 1980

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